

HSE COVID-19: Interim Clinical Guidance – Anti-Inflammatory Medicines for Treatment of Covid-19 symptoms

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Purpose: This guidance is to clarify current evidence for the use of anti-inflammatory medicines for treatment of Covid-19 symptoms.

Target Audience: All healthcare professionals, patients and the public.

Updated commentary to 08 / 04 / 2020

The HSE has reviewed the evidence and opinions in relation to non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) in people with COVID-19. The HSE concludes that there is no evidence of an association between ibuprofen or other NSAIDs and worsening of COVID-19. Ibuprofen and other NSAIDs may be used in line with their product information. The HSE advice of 16th March 2020 is unchanged.

HSE advice is in line with the conclusions of the Health Products Regulatory Agency¹, the European Medicines Agency², the Food and Drugs Administration³ and the World Health Organisation⁴.

The European Medicines Agency statement on 18th March 2020 states, “There is currently no scientific evidence establishing a link between ibuprofen and worsening of COVID-19.”

“When starting treatment for fever or pain in COVID-19, patients and healthcare professionals should consider all available treatment options including paracetamol and NSAIDs.”

“In line with EU national treatment guidelines, patients and healthcare professionals can continue using NSAIDs (like ibuprofen) as per the approved product information.”

The US Food and Drugs Administration states “At this time, FDA is not aware of scientific evidence connecting the use of NSAIDs, like ibuprofen, with worsening COVID-19 symptoms.”

The World Health Organisation issued an answer to the question, “Could ibuprofen worsen disease for people with COVID19”? on 18th March. Their answer states, “At present, based on currently available information, WHO does not recommend against the use of ibuprofen. We are also consulting with physicians treating COVID-19 patients and are not aware of reports of any negative effects of ibuprofen, beyond the usual known side effects that limit its use in certain populations. WHO is not aware of published clinical or population-based data on this topic”.

HSE Press Release 16th March 2020, available from

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/media/pressrel/advice-about-anti-inflammatory-medication-and-covid-19.html>

Advice about Anti-Inflammatory medication and COVID-19

The HSE is today, (Monday 16th March 2020), advising anyone with Covid-19 to continue to take any medication you were already taking, unless you are told not to by a healthcare professional. This includes anti-inflammatories (NSAID) such as ibuprofen, naproxen or diclofenac.

In response to false information about anti-inflammatory medication and Covid-19 circulating in media and on social media over the last 24 hours, Dr Colm Henry, Chief Clinical Officer of the HSE advises, "Only take one anti-inflammatory medication at a time. It is okay to take paracetamol and an anti-inflammatory like ibuprofen at the same time.

"There is no evidence to stop any medication at this time. There is no need to order more medicines than you need, as this will affect the supply of medicines to others, and there is no disruption to the supply of medicines. If you have respiratory symptoms, do not attend your pharmacy in person. Phone your pharmacist if you need to order a prescription. Ask a family member to collect any medicines you need.

"We are constantly evaluating emerging evidence about the most appropriate treatment of Covid-19. There is no specific treatment for coronavirus but many of the symptoms of the virus can be treated. If you get the virus, your healthcare professional will advise treatment based on your symptoms. The appropriate medication for an individual with symptoms of COVID-19 will depend on your symptoms, your other conditions and your other medication."

HSE advice regarding treatment of symptoms of Covid-19:

Drink enough water to avoid dehydration. Your pee should be light yellow or clear.

Paracetamol or ibuprofen may help with symptoms such as pain or fever. Paracetamol is usually recommended as the first-line treatment for most people. Before taking any medication you should read the full package leaflet that comes with your medicine. You should also follow any advice a healthcare professional gives you.

Antibiotics do not work against coronavirus or any viruses. They only work against bacterial infections.

Supportive treatments, like oxygen therapy, can be given while your own body fights the virus. Life support can be used in extreme cases.

Regular medication, including anti-inflammatory medication, may be continued by people with COVID-19, unless advised otherwise by their healthcare professional. Only one anti-inflammatory medication (NSAID, e.g. ibuprofen, naproxen, diclofenac) should be taken at a time. An NSAID and paracetamol may be taken together if required.

Please see www.hse.ie/coronavirus for official information about Covid-19.

Background about false social media reports regarding anti-inflammatories

A message circulating on social media yesterday regarding the use of anti-inflammatories is false. Cork University Hospital and its consultants did not make comments or recommendations about anti-inflammatory medication and patients with Covid-19.

The Infectious Diseases Society of Ireland last night confirmed the message was untrue, to be ignored and deleted. The message is false and should be removed from any social media site. Anybody who has circulated the message is asked to remove it and explain that it is false.

The French Health Minister has made a statement which recommends that paracetamol should be used and anti-inflammatory medication avoided in people with Covid-19 in France. This is based on French analysis and is not in line with the analysis and recommendations of the HSE and other EU countries.

Anti-inflammatory medication: A group of medicines with analgesic (reduces pain), antipyretic (reduces fever) and anti-inflammatory properties (reduces inflammation, in longer-term use) including ibuprofen (e.g. brands such as Nurofen[®], Brufen[®], some cold and flu remedies), naproxen (e.g. Naprosyn[®], Vimovo[®]), diclofenac (e.g. Difene[®], Diclac[®]), mefenamic acid (e.g. Ponstan[®]) and other medicines. Also known as Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs).

Paracetamol is an analgesic (pain killer) and antipyretic (reduces fever). It is available over the counter in many brands, including Calpol[®] and many cough and cold remedies.

Last updated on: 16 / 03 / 2020

HSE COVID-19: Information about your Medicines – Anti-Inflammatory Medicines, available from <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/coronavirus-treatment.html>

Ibuprofen and other anti-inflammatory medication

It is okay to take anti-inflammatories (NSAID) if you have coronavirus. There is no evidence that they are unsafe.

Only take one anti-inflammatory medication at a time. It is okay to take paracetamol and an anti-inflammatory like ibuprofen at the same time.

Anti-inflammatory medicines include:

ibuprofen - brand names: Nurofen, Actiprofen, Advil, Brufen, Brupro, Buplex, Easofen, and Fenopine.
Ibuprofen gel can be called Nurofen, Melfen, Phorpain, Ibugel and Ibuleve

naproxen – brand name: Naprosyn

diclofenac – brand names: Voltarol, Diclo, Diclac, Cataflam, Difene and Flector

Last updated on: 5th April 2020

References

1. Health Products Regulatory Agency statement 16th March, updated 18th March COVID-19 infection: anti-inflammatory and anti-hypertensive medicines Available from <https://www.hpra.ie/homepage/medicines/news-events/item?t=/covid-19-infection-anti-inflammatory-and-anti-hypertensive-medicines&id=2d2c0d26-9782-6eee-9b55-ff00008c97d0> (accessed 8th April 2020)
2. European Medicines Agency statement 18th March. EMA gives advice on the use of non-steroidal anti-inflammatories for COVID-19 . Available from <https://www.ema.europa.eu/en/news/ema-gives-advice-use-non-steroidal-anti-inflammatories-covid-19> (accessed 8th April 2020)
3. Food and Drugs Administration statement 19th March. FDA advises patients on use of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) for COVID-19. Available from <https://www.fda.gov/drugs/drug-safety-and-availability/fda-advises-patients-use-non-steroidal-anti-inflammatory-drugs-nsaids-covid-19>
4. World Health Organisation 18th March 2020. Statement on Twitter. Tweets available from <https://twitter.com/WHO/status/1240409217997189128> and <https://twitter.com/WHO/status/1240409220916432899> (accessed 8th April 2020)